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IN
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Introduction:

Amid today's talk of population explosions, of countries rapidly filling with people, Canada's Northwest Territories, 1.3 million square miles above the 60th parallel with only 23,000 people, seem strangely incongruous. It is possible to travel through the forests of the Mackenzie River Valley or across the barren tundra to the east and north for hundreds of miles without meeting a living soul.

If there is not much mental illness to provide statistical material it is because the population is so small. But there is evidence of mental disturbance, probably due to the clash of the Indian* and Eskimo cultures with the new ways of the white man and the eroding effect of solitary living on the white radio operator, teacher, nurse, administrative officer or clergyman, used to the noise and bustle of the more crowded, urban south.

Therefore, this paper deals more with the external environment of Canada's north and its psychological effect on the people who live there than with actual mental illness neatly labelled.

The External Environment:

One would not suppose that trees could make so much difference -- to the Eskimo who has never seen them, to the Indian who cannot live without them or to the white man who values them more after he has not seen them for a few months. The "tree line" divides the Northwest Territories into the tree area to the west, a quarter of the total area with 60% of the population, and to the east and north the barren, treeless area -- Eskimo country (see map). If the north is a stage, then these areas -- tree and treeless -- provide two kinds of backdrop for the players.

It is a stage filled with contrasts. It can be as hot in summer as a city street in Southern Ontario. In winter it can be so cold and lonely, with bone-chilling wind and all-engulfing blizzard, as to bring fear to the stoutest heart. "Over the most northerly islands mean monthly temperatures are below zero (Fahrenheit) seven months of the year from October to April....The climate of the Mackenzie Valley (the tree area) is known as a sub-arctic type, for although average winter temperatures are nearly as low as those over the Arctic islands, summers are comparatively warm with mean July temperatures near 60° Fahrenheit" (1).

How does this environment look to the white man? Fly into Canada's north in winter. For hours there will be nothing to see but a barren, unfriendly mass of white. By peering closely through the plane's frost-encrusted windows, one may just be able to discern shoreline or mountains, depending on the area, but the general impression is one of unbroken, bleakly majestic waste. After a few hours one may experience a pressing desire to get back to a landscape giving variety to the eye, where death by freezing is safely out of sight and where the certainties of life -- friends, food, shelter and amusement -- can be touched, smelled, seen and heard.

Eventually someone on the aircraft points out, with relief in his voice, small dots in the distance which one has to admit are different from anything on the endless waste of the past few hours. From two or three miles away at 3,000 feet these pimples of civilization look comforting but terrifyingly insignificant against the backdrop of Arctic emptiness.

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*This term throughout this paper refers to North American Indians of the Northwest Territories of Canada who are registered with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

As the plane gets closer one sees the standard pattern of the northern settlement; a sprinkling of wooden houses showing scarcely any colour contrast, a radio mast and moving figures of men and dogs.

The plane lands on the ice of a lake or river and usually a little roughly. One descends into a world of nipping cold, brisk and dry, a world of excited, fur clad Eskimos, dogs and glad-to-see-you white men muffled in parkas -- a world of extraordinary quietness, freshness of air and extreme whiteness -- against which the odd pile of garbage, dog faeces, frozen urine, bones of animals or mechanical junk seem faintly sacrilegious (2).

In contrast, float down the Mackenzie River in a canoe on a brilliant August afternoon. The sun is hot, the water almost warm to the fingertips as it swirls along. The river is wide -- a mile or more in some places -- the banks of gravel and sand, topped by poplar, spruce, birch and pine. The hours go by; mile after mile of shore, water and sky, without a sign of human existence. Even birds and animals are scarce. In this very silent world, gazing at the river bank, lulled almost to sleep, it is not hard to find yourself thinking that the canoe is standing still, its edge a window on a moving strip of water, beach, grassy edge and trees -- here a gleaming birch, there a leaning pine -- a boulder, turning its face away from you as it moves past.

A fallen tree slips by, lying forlornly, its slender tip wetted by the river's fringe, its roots clinging to the bank. You look for evidence of man: marks of an axe, squared timber, old tin cans, a shack, an upturned boat, a pathway up the bank, even footprints. You find none. In the sky an immense white cloud hangs over distant blue hills. Time unreels like an endless canvas of colour, painted by a giant artist, moving in absolute silence as if on oiled rollers.

At last, round a bend in the river, smoke and the ugly, square outlines of buildings. Nearer, canoes drawn up on the beach and larger boats bobbing at anchor; moving figures on the bank; Indian women with brightly coloured dresses and beaded mocassins, their children standing and gazing at you, then turning away to play. The spell is broken. The landscape halts and the canoe moves again, until you step out onto wet sand or a floating wharf.

The urban Canadian, taking for granted the planning of almost every half hour -- sometimes of every minute -- for work or pleasure, finds himself in an entirely different world. If he has come to join an existing organization there may not be enough to do. If he is striking out on his own he may find that the threshold of survival creeps so fearfully close that he must wear himself out at unaccustomed tasks just to maintain life itself. At his door the vastness of the terrain and the inexorable forces of the weather dwarf his imagination and cause him to shrink back into the safety of his wooden box, where the walls seem to close in like a prison and where the daily business of working, cooking, washing dishes, feeding the children, dressing and undressing, emptying the toilet, doing the laundry, maintaining equipment and merely keeping warm have changed from a rather easy Southern Canadian ritual to a northern struggle.

Where he came from, a tremendous variety of means existed for the pleasurable stimulation of the five senses. He lived in a world of constant alternatives, where if he did not like one way he could usually choose another, with respect to the little details of minute-to-minute existence. Now, with the suddenness of air travel, he is in a completely different world. He no longer has a wide range of stimuli. He must suddenly change the focus of his daily living from the broad spectrum of city life and television to the narrow, immediate foreground of an empty northern beach. Where in the south he could see at a glance perhaps 1,000 things, he is now limited to 50. Where in the south there was a constant background of noise, against which he could identify a variety of perhaps 100 familiar sounds, now he can hear no more than 15 or 20 against an infinite silence or a howling wind. His tastes may be limited to the food that he (or his predecessor) was required to order 12 months before and that now stands stacked in his storeroom, leaving no taste surprises or unexpected aromas. Where before he might shake two dozen hands in a week he has shaken all the hands there are before a month is out. Where before there were hundreds of objects to touch, he now has the doorknob, the button on his radio and the handle of the pump lying in the fuel oil drum outside his back door. There is little else to touch but ice and snow (2).

To the Indian and Eskimo this great, lonely land is home. The Indian moves amongst his trees like a white man amongst his friends. His practised senses note birch bark for canoes, resin from the pine, slender saplings for staves and snowshoes, moss on rocks, tracks of animals, crack of dry twig, the sheen of water seen through leaves, the darting shadow of fox or the urgent, heavy beat of frightened grouse. No hot, level asphalt roadway for him. No straight lines by preference; red brick or

shiny steel and glass. No crowds of perfumed, shoving people, eyes on watches, bustling feet and swinging skirts, anxious for elbow-room. One new face a month is enough, thank you! He likes his 25 square miles* of forest, river and lake all to himself.

In the treeless area, 108 square miles of lonely, wind-swept tundra for every person in its population, standing on a lonely northern beach, squinting seawards for seal or walrus, or following the caribou herd over mossy marsh or lichened rock, the Eskimo is lord of all he surveys. It is nothing to him to travel 50 or 100 miles for better hunting or trapping. He knows no survey lines, no fences, roads or private land. This is his home to roam as far as boat or feet or dogs can carry. With eyes so sharp that he can see the yellow-white outline of a polar bear a mile across the ice, or spy the whiskered snout of an inquisitive seal, popping up for a look between the ice pans hundreds of yards away, or recognize by the lead dog's harness his cousin's wife's brother returning from the hunt beyond the distant ridge, he needs no crowd for gregarious stimulation of his senses. The sounds of wind and sea, the barking of dogs and the crack of lucky rifle; the taste of warm meat; the fat of marrowbone and the sup of strong, steaming tea -- his wife, his children and a friend or two nearby -- are all he needs for satisfaction.

Reaction and Adaptation:

Over the years the Indians and Eskimos adapted to their tree and treeless worlds or died in the attempt. Shelter, warmth, food, clothing for themselves and their young; these were the objectives of life. Each group solved these problems with the materials at hand. They learned by experience that no individual could exist by himself; sharing was essential to survival. Their bodies hardened to the rough terrain in walking, in climbing, in carrying rough loads, adjusting to the numbing cold on feet, hands and face. They bent to the forces of weather, of want or plenty, living each day to the full lest tomorrow be empty.

Sunrise and sunset and the changes in the seasons; these were their calendar. They knew well the seasonal habits of fish and game. Their attitudes towards the lapse of time -- and certainly of time measurement -- were quite different from the white man's, with his calendar and his clock. They were accustomed to spending half a day discussing what an organization man would expect to dispose of in two or three minutes.

There was not much insulation between them and their environment; they were literally in contact with earth, snow or water, forest or ice, flesh, blood and skin, with an intimacy few living white men have ever experienced. Even as small children, by the time breast feeding stopped and they began to eat from the family cooking pot, they were taking for granted the sights and sounds of childbirth, of pain, of love-making, of danger, of anguish and of death. They grew up to believe that the ebb and flow of misfortune could be explained by the pleasures or displeasures of the spirits. There was not much incentive to plan for the future with death at their heels and the way ahead so unpredictable. Apart from the traditions dictated by experience, life was a matter of daily trial and error. For some Indians and many Eskimos it is still so.

Into these states of equilibrium with nature came the white men; some to search for gain, with gadgets and gun; some with the Book and offers of eternal life. Into the Indian and Eskimo worlds of spirits, determining their superstitions and customs, which formed links of expectation from one stage in life to the next, passed on from father to son, came the missionary, with the concept of sin, engendering new anxieties and guilt, new hopes; dispensing knowledge, kindness and self-sacrifice.

The profit motive arrived. Hunting skills were partly turned from the quest for life's necessities to the quest for furs that could be bartered for trinkets, cloth, nails and knives. The white man increased this skill by providing guns, ammunition and traps. The new acquisitive urge swept the land. This was the beginning of new pressures on body and mind.

All this came to the Indian earlier than to the Eskimo. Only a few Indian oldtimers remember what it was like when few white men came down The River. Most are so used to being obsequious that they find it hard to remember pride of race. As in many another instance, disease, alcohol and the gun, all brought by the white man, were their undoing. Jenness has this to say (3): "Whisky and brandy destroyed the self-respect of the Indians, weakened every family and tribal tie, and made them,

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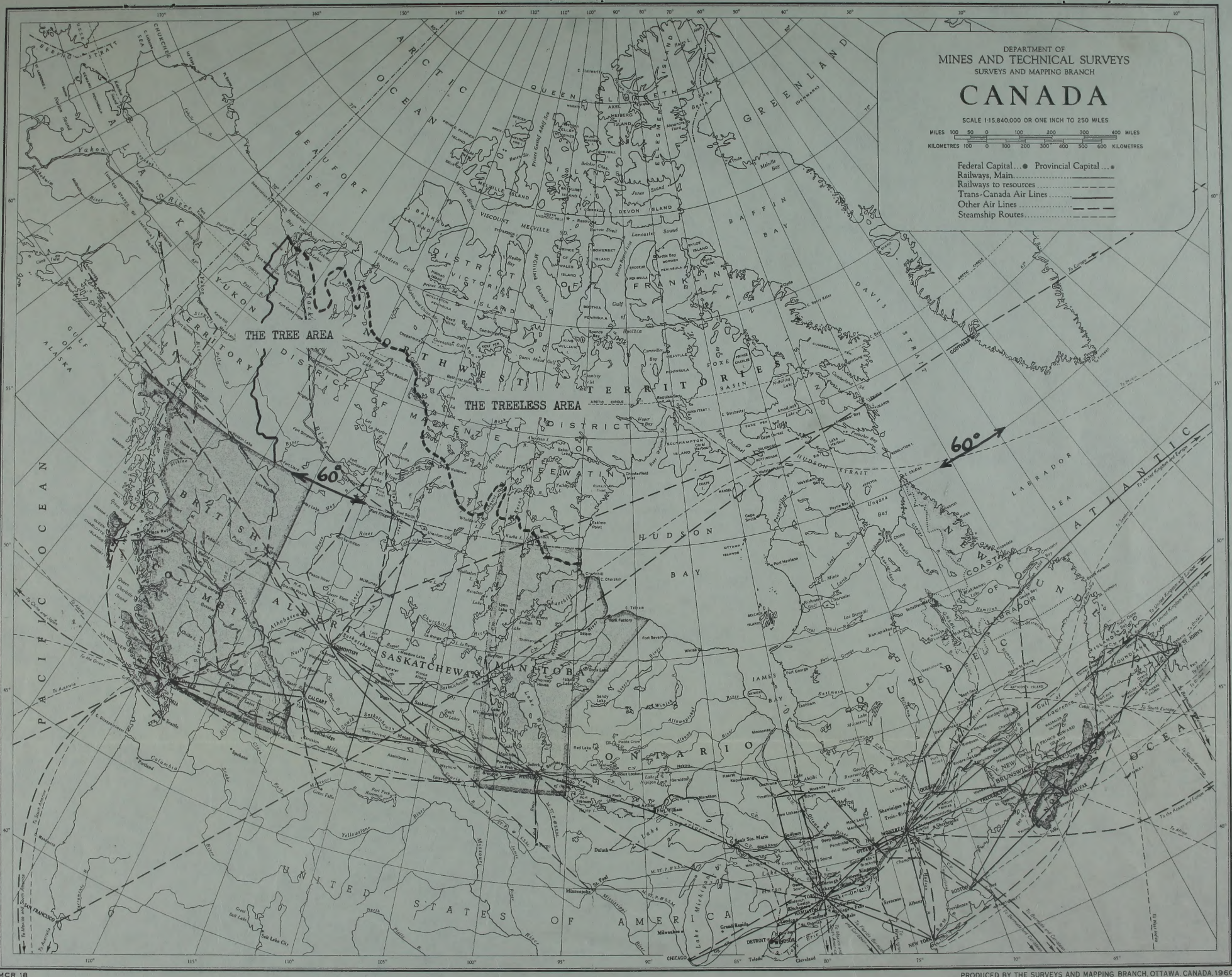
*In the tree area there are about 25 square miles of land area per person in the population.



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CANADA

willing or unwilling, the slaves of the trading-posts where liquor was dispensed to them by the keg. Even the fur traders recognized its evils and gladly supported the government when it finally prohibited all sale to the Indians under penalty of a heavy fine. Disease and alcohol demoralized and destroyed the Indians just when they needed all their energy and courage to cope with the new conditions that suddenly came into existence around them. The old order changed completely with the coming of Europeans. Stone tools and weapons gave place to tools and weapons of iron; cooking vessels of clay, skin, bark, and wood to metal pots; the fire-stick to the flint and steel, and bows and arrows to firearms. Once a tribe had made these changes it could not revert to its former conditions because it had lost most of its earlier skill in chipping knives and arrowheads of flint, in grinding out stone axes, and fashioning serviceable bows. Any withdrawal of the trading-posts upon which the Indians were now dependent would have caused endless hardships and widespread starvation." This was long ago and there has been time for wounds of hurt pride to heal, even though they were deeper wounds than the Eskimo is likely to experience because they happened at a time when the Southern Canadian knew little of the "social sciences" and cared little about the opinions and ambitions of Canada's indigenous people.

The Indian's way of life is now so dependent on the white man's world that escape is quite impossible, even if it were sought. He is usually tied to the trading-post. The use of synthetic materials and the uncertainties of the world of fashion have reduced the market for furs, but there are other ways by which he can earn the dollars essential for his existence; as a labourer in rough outdoor work, as a guide for tourist hunters, in domestic service to the white man, as a semi-skilled or skilled artisan in wood and metal or as a mechanic, depending on the amount of technical training he has been able to acquire. He now has more money in his pocket than ever before, but he has had to enter the white man's world at the bottom of the status ladder to get it. The greatly increased school program will improve his economic prospects but the net effect so far has been that he has tended to insulate himself from his real environment and create for himself a sometimes pitiful copy of the artificial environment of the white man. In one sense, therefore, he is getting further and further away from the tree area as he once knew it and adjusted to it. On the other hand he now has more of the temporary escapes of the white man -- the radio, the phonograph, the outboard motor, movies, comic books, candy and alcohol.

The Eskimos' encounter with the northern manifestations of Southern Canada was more recent. There are still some Eskimos who live in snow houses in winter and skin tents in summer; who dress in polar bearskin trousers and shade their eyes with visors of slitted bone. There are many who enjoy a piece of raw caribou meat; who use modern rifles to shoot the walrus but plunge an old-fashioned harpoon into its carcass to secure it, hauling in the dripping sealskin line with mitts stitched from skin and sinew; who prefer their strange guttural tongue to English or French, making it abundantly clear that they love their cold and lonely world, whatever the white man might think of it.

"The substance of the situation is that Eskimos are trying just as hard today to adapt as they did 500 or 900 years ago; the difficulty is that they are adapting not to the Arctic but to a Temperate Zone way of living. The new people with their new standards have nearly overwhelmed the Eskimos, not in numbers but in wishes and wants. The difficulty is that the newcomers did not come from elsewhere in the Arctic or even the Subarctic. They came from the south, the Temperate Zone, and they are not really trying to adapt to the Arctic, except in isolated particulars such as modification of building foundations and airstrips for construction on permafrost. Instead, they require that the people of the Arctic adapt to an artificial or a partial ecological zone, the outsiders' transplanted Temperate Zone." (4)

The older Eskimo tries to stay in his shell. A lifetime close to danger and death has taught him to accept what he does not understand and cannot change. On the surface, at least, he has adapted amazingly well, retaining his characteristic sense of humour. Some white men may think of him as a child, with his simple ways and naive explanations for natural phenomena. He can find the white man amusing, nicknaming him descriptively with phrases like "The One Whose Chin Shakes" or "Little Eyes". One Eskimo group's opinion: "There are only bosses on top of each other". (5)

The younger Eskimo may go quietly about his business, but he is not blind to occasional indications of contempt because of language barriers, lack of knowledge or clumsiness because of lack of skill and experience. He can resent just as deeply the white man who patronizes, oozing smiles and soft words, gaining his way with hand-outs of money, food or clothing, or smothering with over-attention.

More and more Eskimos are learning to like the comforts, variety and security of the white man's life. Hundreds of them have been to Southern Canada as tuberculosis patients, spending months and even years in warm, comfortable, hygienic surroundings. They have learned the taste of corn flakes, maple syrup and steaks well

done. They have seen television, comic books, trees, cars and flush toilets. Now in the north they are building themselves wooden houses to live in, with walls papered with pages from popular magazines, linoleum on the floor, beds, tables and chairs. The battery operated radio, the kerosene pressure lantern, nylon clothing, watches and ball-point pens, even hi-fi sets and French perfume, now appear in their homes.

Under the old ways of life, the north was full of physical perils -- cold, exposure, drowning, blizzard, starvation -- that forced men to unite against them. These perils could be sensed by everybody. They could be fought together. Even the loneliness of northern isolation had a physical quality; emptiness of landscape, the bareness of rock or sea ice, the huge silence. Indian and Eskimo hunters faced such perils almost daily.

Only in war or peacetime catastrophe do white men experience the unifying effect of physical peril. But their world has other perils, fearful to the Indian and Eskimo; the possibility of failing to gain the master's goodwill, competition with each other, a new concept of time, a strange system of rewards and punishments, "do as I say and not as I do", symbols to covet for status, the potential hatreds generated by invidious comparisons of clothing, speech, personal hygiene, skills and possessions. These perils face everybody, but by their nature seem to focus on the individual, giving him a peculiar sensation of having to fight them alone. This is enhanced by the white man's doctrine of individualism, which paradoxically stresses the value of the individual, cherishes him as a free person, then beams a social searchlight on him and pressures him to measure up to the social norm. For the Indian and Eskimo in cultural transition all this is confusing -- a new kind of loneliness -- new perils of the mind that permeate the whole being and yet can be seen only by introspection and appear to be untouchable. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness." (6)

In this connection, two brief histories of Eskimos sent south for long term treatment are worth mentioning. A 47 year old Eskimo woman who had spent two years in a sanatorium in Southern Canada, was repatriated by air to her home on Baffin Island. Soon she was found to be suffering from pyoderma of the scalp and severe conjunctivitis. This was treated unsuccessfully on an out-patient basis and she had to be taken to the mission hospital at Pangnirtung. While there she told the physician that she was extremely unhappy at home, that she had not been well received by her husband and that she felt mistrusted by him and by the rest of her family. She said she knew they were a dirty lot and that she had been attempting to clean up her tent and her children, but that any such effort was looked upon by them as foreign and with suspicion. The physician discussed this with her husband and reported that the discussion left him feeling sorry for the woman and quite helpless.

Some six months later, on a visit to that particular Eskimo camp, the physician found the woman looking as dirty and as happy as the other Eskimos. He reported that she had one of the dirtiest and shabbiest tents. But her skin lesions were completely healed. There was no opportunity for private discussion with her during this visit and it was felt wisest to treat her exactly the same as all the other people without reference to any of her previous feelings. The following morning, as the physician was about to leave the camp and most of the Eskimos were still in bed, the woman arrived at his sled and passed him a piece of paper. On it was written: "I am dirty but I am happy now".

At the age of three an Eskimo boy had been sent to a hospital in Southern Manitoba because of tuberculosis. He was repatriated by air to Central Baffin Island three years later, a pale, puny looking boy who seemed quite intelligent. He openly stated to the physician that he did not like Eskimos because they could not talk -- "only jabber". He had forgotten (if indeed he ever knew) all his Eskimo and spoke and wrote English well for his age. Some people were quite reluctant to see him return to an Eskimo camp as he would "never be able to adjust", would "never survive". However, his father, a widower with an adult daughter, was quite insistent on his son's return.

Six months later, during a visit to his camp, the physician observed this boy with some interest. He spoke Eskimo with facility and appeared to understand everything that was being said. He would not speak a single word of English to the physician (although he had talked it freely six months before). He appeared healthy and had gained weight. He seemed happier playing with the other Eskimo children in the camp than the physician had ever seen him.

How the Southern Canadian reacts to the north depends upon a number of factors. If his destination is in the tree area, particularly one of the larger settlements, he may find an environment not unlike the one he left, particularly if he comes from a small southern community or a farm. Even if he comes from a large city he will probably find Yellowknife, Inuvik, Hay River or Fort Smith tolerable -- at least for a year or two. On the other hand, if his destination is a small settlement such as Arctic Bay, Bathurst Inlet or Eskimo Point he may find mental adjustment quite

difficult. Some find it impossible.

He may discover that he can divert his attention from the confines of his Arctic prison by absorbing himself in the detail of his work. Almost instinctively he avoids looking at the woods and concentrates on the trees, as it were, then on a single tree and finally on the hind leg of an ant crawling up one of the furrows in the bark on the south side of the tree. Keep looking at that hind leg, he tells himself. Do not let your eyes wander for a second; the sight of something else might flood the mind with frightening things. Become fascinated by details; in them you will find peace. Oh, if only there really were trees to look at! (2)

"All living organisms require a constant bombardment of external stimuli in order to function in their normal fashion i.e., to be comfortable. Wide open spaces can be defective in stimuli.

"There are two kinds of wide open spaces -- the productive and the desolate. The productive -- such as the steppes of Eurasia or the prairies and pampas of the Americas or even sparsely settled rural areas have a powerful attraction to some people. Others reject them for even more varied attractions. Desolation on the other hand creates despondency in every normal person. Stable people do not laugh at a burned out forest or even one home. Very few can find anything amusing about the Sahara or the vast frozen wastes of the far north. Despondency can lead to apathy; apathy to depression. The end of the road in depression is suicide." (7)

Sometimes a northern job does not give a man enough to do. The southern administrator who sends him may argue that, because there must be somebody at Point X on the map to measure temperature and wind velocity, for example, obviously a whole man must be sent to live at Point X, even though the workload is only a fraction of what a self-respecting man would expect to do. After all, argues the southern administrator, half a man or one-eighth of a man cannot be sent, whatever may be the fraction of a man-day required for the daily routine. Therefore he sends a whole man. Unfortunately this same southern administrator may have had neither the time nor the inclination to determine what to do with the unused half man or seven-eighths man, as the case may be. Worse than this, he will likely point out that, after all, Man A sent to Point X may drop dead. The measurements must be made. Man A must have time off and he may get sick. Therefore Man B must also be sent. The evil of not enough to do is therefore compounded. (2)

On the other hand, if the new northerner is by himself or working with only a few others, he may, particularly if they are ill-equipped, find himself spending an inordinate amount of time maintaining his environment at the temperature level which his Southern Canadian culture demands, keeping the electric generator functioning, adjusting and filling the oil heater, cutting, hauling and melting ice for water, heating water for washing body and clothes, cooking, housecleaning and producing explanatory memoranda for his head office to justify his existence; to him a sort of insult added to injury.

His motive in volunteering for northern service is important. He may be young, enterprising and ready to go for a limited period in exchange for extraordinary remuneration. His objective is money, for further education, to invest in business or for travel. He is at best an honest transient.

He may go possessed with a missionary spirit. The northern challenge may appeal to him -- to prove something to himself and to others. The motive is good so long as he goes properly trained and prepared, his good intentions balanced with common sense.

Perhaps he sees in the north a place of escape. He may have failed in his objectives in the south. He wanted to be more successful, to have a place in the sun, but the competition was too keen. Perhaps in the north there will be so few other people to stand in his way that his importance will become apparent.

Whatever his type, the strain of northern living, the isolation, the relative lack of recreational facilities, the limited circle of social contacts, the length of the winter and its intensity, the sensation of claustrophobia induced by the proximity of the physical perils and the limitations of transportation and communication, push in upon a man until he may come to mark off the days on his calendar like a countdown to escape. Yet there are some Southern Canadians who like this immense, quiet, challenging world.

Mental Ill-health:

Inevitably some northern residents, under the physical and mental pressures

that have been described, have difficulty adapting to these new circumstances. Changes in behaviour may occur, first noticed by family and friends and then coming to the ears of the local missionary, teacher, or nurse.

There are so few people for such a large area, however, that it is probable that a man's behaviour could be eccentric to a degree that would be considered intolerable in Southern Canada, before the pressures of social control were brought to bear upon him. A man could be very odd indeed and be left alone, as long as he did not resort to violence against himself or others.

However, there is little evidence to support this reasoning. Suffice to say that more and more of the white status mental patients are being admitted to mental hospitals voluntarily, while many of the Eskimo mental patients are admitted with a history of aggression. Does this mean that there may be a reservoir of mentally disturbed Eskimos who, if they lived at the white social level, would be urged or even pushed into voluntary committal to a mental hospital, but who are allowed to remain in their communities? Or does it mean that aggression is a characteristic of mental illness in Eskimos? Perhaps even the criteria by which a northerner's emotional stability is judged may be different from those of Southern Canada.

The facts are meagre. Table 1 shows the number of mental patients under hospital care, by ethnic group, for the period 1955-61. The figures are so small as to make deductions dangerous. The similarity between the Indian, Eskimo and all-

TABLE 1

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Patients Under Care in Mental Hospitals

1955-61

Year	TOTALS		INDIANS		ESKIMOS		WHITE STATUS		ALL CANADA RATE
	Number	Rate*	Number	Rate*	Number	Rate*	Number	Rate*	
1955	26	138	7	170	13	186	6	78	406
1956	44	228	8	189	27	370	9	116	405
1957	41	205	6	139	26	349	9	109	396
1958	43	202	12	270	22	288	9	98	389
1959	54	248	17	373	25	320	12	127	381
1960	49	219	10	214	26	328	13	133	327**
1961	59	257	14	292	32	390	13	130	-

* per 100,000 population

** preliminary figure.

Canada rates is apparent. The white status rate is noticeably lower, but then it must be remembered that the white status group contains a large number of carefully selected government employees in the young adult and middle age groups, with a preponderance of males.

Physicians, nurses and welfare workers have feared a radical increase in the number of Eskimo mental patients, as a result of the rapid increase in the pace of northern development within the past eight years. There is little evidence that their fears have materialized, though the picture is clouded by behavioural problems caused by alcohol and by the new urge to acquire possessions.

The Appendix contains notes on eleven Eskimo mental patients now being treated in Southern Canadian mental hospitals. Aggression in these patients is summarized in Table 2.

The suicides consisted of one by shooting and one by hanging. The suicide attempts and the threats to self and others involved knives. There are unusual

TABLE 2

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Aggression in Eskimo Mental Patients

1962

Forms of Aggression	Before Admission	In Hospital	Total
Attempted Suicide	4	1	5
Threats to Self	1	1	2
Threats to Others	3	1	4
Actual Aggression to Others	2	4	6
Homicide	1	-	1

varieties of self aggression. One Eskimo girl tied string around her wrists until they swelled. Another picked her nose until it bled.

Balikci's (8) observations on the record of suicide of the Arviligjuar Eskimos of Pelly Bay in the Central Arctic are interesting. These Eskimos presently number about 130 individuals.

"During the last fifty years, according to the collected data, 50 cases of successful and attempted suicide occurred in the general area; 35 represent successful suicides, 4 attempted but unsuccessful suicides; 11 individuals expressed their intention to kill themselves but did not go further for various reasons.

"Our record shows that males have a greater tendency to suicide than females. The age distribution of our cases shows one ten year old boy, 5 young adults 15 to 20 years old, 24 adults 20 to 55 years of age, 6 individuals over 55 and under 60, and 12 elderly persons.

"Married individuals are clearly in predominance; 34 were married and had children, three were married without children, 3 elderly women were widows and 5 individuals only were not married.

"There is considerable variation in suicide techniques. Eleven individuals used a gun in killing or trying to kill themselves....Twenty-three individuals have hanged themselves using skin thongs....There are four cases of strangulation....Two cases of drowning were recorded.

"Our record shows that 34 individuals entered in some sort of interaction with other Eskimos during the visible operation of the suicidal process. Eleven verbally expressed their desire to kill themselves; six individuals announced their wish to be executed by somebody else; two asked the help of others to terminate their act; eighteen consulted relatives prior to going further; nine were successfully stopped by relatives from killing themselves.

"Let us enumerate briefly the main motives of suicide as given by our informants. About twenty individuals reached the suicidal decision following a disaster occurring to a near relative, usually a descendant. Sixteen other individuals took the fatal decision because of a disaster occurring to themselves, namely, illness. In six cases we find marital dissatisfaction. Informants were specific that only four elderly persons killed themselves because of old age."

It should be remembered that life for the Indians and Eskimos has always been violent; survival by death of animals, not discreetly hidden as in the southern slaughter-house, but the work of each breadwinner's own hands. The dead animal was frequently brought into the living-room, where it would not freeze, and skinned and butchered on the floor. Raw skin, bleeding flesh and entrails were as much a part of the children's world as of the adult's and the associated violence was taken for granted. Is it not reasonable to suppose that as the natural outlets for aggression provided by the hunt are closed, because of a shift towards the white man's way of life, the potential for aggression will seek other outlets, unless sublimated in football or driving motor vehicles? Perhaps this accounts for the behaviour of Eskimos in new communities such as Inuvik and Frobisher Bay, where the incidence of convictions for indictable offences, chiefly breaking and entering and assault, appears to exceed

that for communities of similar size in Southern Canada.

Alcohol is proving to be a new enemy of the Eskimo, particularly in the Mackenzie River delta and at Frobisher Bay. As one social welfare officer put it: "I have seen the reaction of many Eskimos to the sale of alcohol. It is a mystifying force, one that is not understood by the people, and when compounded by the changing cultural patterns, the lack of education, recreation and housing, is creating a serious problem in the community. Alcohol among the Eskimo people in Frobisher Bay is like an octopus. Its tentacles reach out and involve many people, the young and the old, the married and single, male and female. I have watched a Western Eskimo person with a reasonable education, a record of good work and considered to be a competent workman, gradually become degenerated through excessive use of alcohol. Repeated warnings, threats, interviews with the Welfare Officers, seem to have no effect on this man. He knows he is doing wrong and all he will say is 'I'll try again. I do not like what I am doing but I cannot help myself'. One cannot observe these situations without being much concerned". How much this sounds like the sad old story of alcoholism in the white man's world!

It has been suggested that some Eskimos take to alcohol as a way of escape from an environment so obviously poorer and more squalid than that of white status persons living in the same community. Another suggestion is that some Eskimos take alcohol merely for the resultant feeling of elation; another that alcohol makes the Eskimo feel "9 feet tall"; yet another that it gives him a way of daring the law, itself something rather new and strange to many Eskimos. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that the consumption of alcohol by Eskimos at places like Inuvik and Frobisher Bay, and the incidence of summary convictions for liquor offences, is causing increasing concern. Although some aggressive behaviour has been linked with indulgence in alcohol, some of the most serious cases of aggression were of Eskimos who had never been convicted for liquor offences.

Promiscuity, particularly in the Aklavik-Inuvik area, frequently associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages, is on the increase amongst Eskimos. Of the 48 Eskimo live births in this area in 1961, 15 or 31% were illegitimate, compared with an incidence amongst the other 439 Eskimo live births elsewhere of only 4.8%. It must be remembered that the Eskimos' attitude towards sex has been somewhat different from the conventional attitude of Southern Canada. "The social organization of the Eskimos was based on the family, but intermarriage, the frequent adoption of children and the custom of exchanging wives and husbands from time to time, provided close and friendly links between families....Marriages were usually arranged by the parents.... if the couple proved to be ill-suited to one another the marriage did not last. Polygamy was fairly common and polyandry was accepted though it was rare." (9) Unfortunately, the incidence of gonorrhoea is six times the national incidence and most of it is confined to the larger settlements where the mixing of cultures is going on.

For every Indian committed to a mental hospital, there are scores who go doggedly about their work or sit dejectedly in their cabins when they are not motivated by lack of food to work or try hunting or trapping. The factors that influence them to indulge in aggressive behaviour are much the same as for the Eskimos. But they have been subject to the counter-pressures of the white man's law and the white man's religion for longer.

Alcohol has been and still is at the root of many of the behavioural problems of Indians. Jenness says (3): "The Indians, unlike many other primitive peoples, had no alcoholic beverages in prehistoric times, and from the earliest days of settlement they abandoned every restraint in their frenzy for the white man's firewater. 'They do not call it drinking unless they become drunk, and do not think they have been drinking unless they fight and are hurt'". Be that as it may, the records of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police show that, of the 18 murders committed in the Northwest Territories since 1942, 11 were by persons of white status, 5 by Eskimos, 2 by half-breeds, but none by Indians. Perhaps during his longer period of adjustment the Indian's aggressive potential, although rooted in the primitive way of life of his forefathers, has become softened by learning and acquiring some of the white man's escapes. There is no evidence that the incidence of aggression amongst the few cases of mental illness in Indians is any greater than amongst Southern Canadians.

The Indian illegitimacy rate, about the same throughout the tree area, was 34% in 1961 (75 of 222 live births). The incidence of gonorrhoea amongst Indians was the highest in the Northwest Territories.

The white man has not really adapted to the climate of the north; he has created an artificial temperate zone there, as Lantis has pointed out. (4) This is true even in Southern Canada. Most Canadian homes are kept heated in winter to temperatures so high that the master of the house can sit in an over-stuffed chair in his shirt-sleeves, watching television, on evenings so cold that the trees outside

crackle with temperatures of 20° below zero Fahrenheit or lower. The Southern Canadian is conditioned to spending most of his time during the winter in heated buildings, travelling between them in heated vehicles.

In spite of this conditioning, many Southern Canadians find it hard to adapt to the further restrictions of arctic living. The winters are longer and colder and there are fewer social and recreational escapes. Boag (10) says: "While some of the inhabitants of these settlements do travel, in general it can be said that they deal with the climatic stresses by retiring from them as far as possible, into the shelter of their permanent dwellings. This is almost completely true of the 'temporary' group, as they are often bound by a schedule of duties, have not the knowledge necessary to look after themselves, and lack the contacts with the Eskimos, without whose help anything more than a short journey is impossible for them.

"In the main, therefore, the effect of the climate comes to be exerted indirectly, by emphasizing their isolation and cutting off all activities outside their living quarters. As many of these settlements are quite spread out, the factors mentioned....may serve to isolate the various groups within a settlement from one another. An occasional man will spend a whole winter in his quarters without leaving them to visit neighbours half an hour's walk away, and quite commonly men will do this only on a couple of occasions during the winter.

"Observation during the winter disclosed little in the way of verbalization of feelings of depression; verbal expressions mostly took the form of indirect expressions of hostility. However, nonverbal behaviour frequently showed, to greater or lesser degree, apathy, lack of interest in surroundings, motor retardation, greatly increased hours of sleep, lack of attention to personal appearance and tidiness of quarters, and disinclination to undertake extra work or odd jobs, in spite of complaints of not having enough to do. Men would frequently start the winter with extensive plans for spare-time activities, only to fail almost completely in carrying them out."

Withdrawal and excessive concentration on work seem to be rather common signs that the external environment is "getting the man down". Magnification of minor disagreements may occur, to proportions so large that they may result in strong aggressive action. It is as if the patient felt an overwhelming urge to take a sledge hammer to kill a fly.

Because of the cost of maintaining families at some northern locations, there has been a tendency in the past to provide barrack accommodation and recruit only male personnel. In some instances fraternization with Eskimos has been discouraged and relationships with Eskimo women frowned upon, the objective being to protect the Eskimo from exploitation. Thus sexual frustration was added to the other restrictions. Pinks, speaking of a series of isolated military establishments in the north reports (11): "One of the most notable facts observed during the course of recording interviews was that the younger man who has apparently not established definite sex patterns is much more content with isolated duty than are married men, older single men, or young men who have formed definite habits of sexual intercourse."

The over-sensitive, highly intelligent individual, accustomed to a busy urban life, finds the daily routine in a small northern settlement extremely trying unless he has taken with him hobbies to occupy his spare time. It is probably much safer to send the more stolid, phlegmatic type of individual. As Sir Hubert Wilkins put it (10): "In general I would say that the proper man for service in the Arctic is the average, common-sense man with keen sensitivity and normal physical and mental ability. The Arctic is no place for the subnormal, a difficult place for the supernormal, and impossible for the supersensitive man who lacks control". However, modernization programs in the larger northern settlements have made life there much the same as in Southern Canadian communities of similar size. New attitudes of southern administrators to the problems of northern living and recognition of the benefits of providing family accommodation, even though it is costly, have contributed greatly to this change. As a result, recruitment to northern posts is becoming easier.

The white man of the past was usually sent to the north to do something with or for the Indian or Eskimo. He had to be a jack-of-all-trades and therefore floated to the apex of power in his community because he dispensed knowledge, loaned tools, sold trade goods and cared for the sick. A relationship was built up with the Indian or Eskimo, based on mutual need. However, there is a new kind of Southern Canadian going into the north, a man sent to do expert tasks that have nothing to do with the Indians or Eskimos -- meteorologists, electronic experts, prospectors, aircraft mechanics. Many of them have come from urban areas, attracted to the north by high wages or the chance to escape from the southern "rat-race". They have tended to push the old-time, jack-of-all-trades white man aside and may not need the Indian or Eskimo

except for menial tasks. It is difficult for them to avoid making invidious comparisons between their artificial environment of expensive, oil-heated bunkhouses or 3-bedroom family dwellings, with imported furnishings and most of the comforts of Montreal, and the simple homes of their Indian and Eskimo fellow-Canadians. It is a tribute to both groups that they try so hard to bridge what, after all, is a gulf centuries wide.

Prospects:

All three ethnic groups are adapting remarkably well considering the pace of northern development. The greatly increased school program, in which children of all three groups study together in the day schools and live together in the hostels,* has provided the best possible opportunity for mixing those cultural characteristics that can be salvaged and for growth of the new generation in each ethnic group in the direction of the Canadian norm.

Every effort is being made to build a sound economic base for the Eskimo on fishing, handicrafts, mining, light industry and construction. The younger Indians and Eskimos are responding amazingly to the invitation to leap the time gap and take their places equally in every sense with other Canadians. Education is the doorway to steady employment in skilled artisan and white collar occupations. Steady employment is the way to a higher standard of living. A higher standard of living will, they believe, lead the way from drudgery and ill-health to the kind of life their fellow-Canadians enjoy.

Southern administrators are realizing as never before the desirability of sound personnel policies for recruitment to the north. It is not enough to ask for volunteers; they must be more than merely physically strong and free from disease; they must have a history clear of mental illness -- even psychoneuroses, they should be free from drug and alcohol addiction, and be emotionally mature, with inner resources to fight boredom, laziness, abnormal fascination by detail, quickened temper, cynicism and indulgence in destructive criticism, when they find these northern perils of the mind threatening to ensnare them.

Unfortunately the pace of northern development and the resultant demand for technical and professional workers is such that the demand still outstrips the supply. It is very hard for a personnel officer to keep these high standards in mind if he has only three applicants for five positions. Nevertheless, more and more well-qualified, well-balanced men and women from Southern Canada are accepting the northern challenge, not simply as transients but as settlers. As the educational standards and job opportunities of the Indians and Eskimos increase and their standards of living improve, boldly contrasting ethnic differences will disappear because physical and mental differences will disappear. The long term objective is that they should be, with the white settlers from the south, in every sense Canadians together.

July, 1962.

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*Hostels have been established at large centres such as Fort Smith, Fort Simpson, Inuvik, Fort McPherson, Yellowknife and Chesterfield Inlet. Children whose parents subsist on a semi-nomadic, hunting and trapping economy are congregated, with parental consent, in these hostels to attend local day schools.

SELECTED CASE ABSTRACTS,

ESKIMOS IN MENTAL HOSPITALS, CANADA, 1962

B1:

Female, admitted 1945, age 35, from Southampton Island, N.W.T. No English. Reported homicide; self-absorbed.

Diagnosis: Schizophrenia.

Treatment: Single room night and day because she attacks patients by biting. Leucotomy, 1949. Seven months later still in a single room.

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S3:

Male, admitted 1962, age 35, from Baker Lake, N.W.T.

Had been a fine young man occupied by hunting and fishing, married three years prior to admission; twin children died two years prior to admission and he changed. Became seclusive and two weeks before admission killed an Eskimo couple who moved near his home to live.

Refused to answer question through an interpreter. Weeping, trembling, perspiring and possible hallucinations.

Diagnosis: Schizophrenia.

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V1:

Male, admitted this hospital 1956, age 38, from Leaf River, Quebec (Admitted to another mental hospital 1948 because of excitement. Diagnosis: Schizophrenia).

Had been threatening, aggressive and excited. Deaf mute. Solitary. Bronchiectasis.

Diagnosis: Schizophrenia.

Special Note: History reports he was queer from birth; never strayed far from the tent and was always dirty. "People were afraid of him and he was always worse at full moon when he would walk around all night entering tents and waking people up."

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V3:

Male, admitted 1954, age 29, Old Factory, Quebec.

Reported destructive and fire-setting. Able to speak, read and write English. Bilateral pulmonary tuberculosis.

Diagnosis: Schizophrenia.

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E1:

Female, Aklavik, admitted 1955, age 40.

Saw the devil chasing her, saw his tracks in the snow and thought she was to be killed or burned and have her children taken away.

Diagnosis: Schizophrenia.

Discharged 1959 but readmitted one year later hearing voices and dogs.

Diagnosis: Schizophrenia.

E3:

Female, Brock River, N.W.T., admitted 1956, age 46.

Thought she was to be killed and saw people around the house and heard others talking about her. Attempted suicide with knife and rifle and threatened to kill her family.

Diagnosis: Schizophrenia.

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E4:

Male, Aklavik, admitted 1958, age 26.

Swallowed a four-inch nail. Later chest X-ray revealed aspirated needle. In hospital was stuporous and mute.

Diagnosis: Schizophrenia.

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E8:

Male, Sherman Inlet, Queen Maud Gulf, N.W.T., admitted 1951, age 40.

Stopped hunting, thought of suicide, appeared to hear voices. In mental hospital refused to have anything else to do with other Eskimo patients.

Diagnosis: Schizophrenia.

Special Note: Did not wish to return home to his own people.

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E7:

Female, Coppermine, N.W.T., admitted 1949, age 43.

Admitted because of many hours of laughing, talking and over-activity, followed by long depressed periods. Her only English was swearing words.

Diagnosis: Manic Depressive Reaction.

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B2:

Female, admitted 1953, aged 23, from Southampton Island, N.W.T. Language difficulty.

Violent to self and excited. Recent tuberculosis of right greater trochanter.

Diagnosis: Manic Depressive Psychosis; Hypomania.

Beat a nurse, soiled her bed and threatened to kill her baby. Recovered with electrotherapy.

Readmitted 1956 in acute manic state. Stated she became disturbed in tuberculosis sanatorium because she was homesick.

Readmitted 1960 with emotional lability.

Readmitted 1961. Reported sullen and suffering from labour pains, although no evidence of labour.

Readmitted 1961 again, because depressed and drinking.

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S4:

Female, admitted 1956, age 18, from Resolute Bay.

Pulmonary tuberculosis.

Admitted because when she heard that one of her grandmothers had died, she tried to swallow a pencil and refused to urinate. In a detention cell, she tried to stick her head through the bed rails. Through interpreter she stated that she was lonesome and wanted to be with friends.

Diagnosis: Psychoneurosis. Hysterical.

Readmitted 1960 because she had threatened several people with a knife after receiving news that her other grandmother had died, screamed, moaned and retained her urine.

Readmitted 1961 because she had threatened others and herself with scissors, while in a general hospital.

Special Note: In 1960 an Eskimo reported: "In her childhood she was the property of every wolf human, but she was too young to realize. Her big ambition is to go back to Churchill....Not to Port Harrison because she would have to live the hard Eskimo way".

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